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## AD HOC WORK GROUP

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### MINIDOKA NORTH SIDE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN

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#### Meeting No. 4 Summary *Meeting Date: February 20, 2003*

#### I. MEETING ATTENDEES

##### AHWG Members

*\*Denotes attendance at this AHWG meeting*

- Billy Thompson, Minidoka Irrigation District\*
- Bob Caywood, Pheasants Forever
- Cary Bristol, Cassia County Sheriff's Office\*
- Dan Temple, A&B Irrigation District\*
- Dan Kindig, Minidoka County Sheriff's Office
- Dave Pinther, Local Business
- Dennis Crane, Cassia County Commission\*
- Don Handy, Minidoka County Commission
- Gary Schorzman, Minidoka County Historical Society
- Guy Dodson, Sr., Shoshone-Paiute Tribes
- Veronica Lierman, Jerome County Commission
- Hunter Osborne, Shoshone-Bannock Tribes
- Jerry Ball, Adjacent Landowner and Pheasants Forever\*
- Lloyd Richins, Adjacent Landowner \*
- Mark Fleming, Idaho Department of Fish and Game\*
- Mike Todd, Idaho Department of Fish and Game\*
- Reid Smith, Minidoka County Weed Control\*
- Scott Barker, Bureau of Land Management
- Steve Bouffard, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service\*
- Steve Schuyler, Natural Resource Conservation Service\*
- Trapper Richardson, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation
- Robert Christensen, City of Rupert, City Council\*

##### Planning Team

*\*Denotes attendance at this AHWG meeting*

- Carolyn Burpee Stone, Team Leader, Reclamation\*
- Chris Ketchum, Snake River Area Office Resource Manager, Reclamation\*
- Yvonne Daniel, Realty, Reclamation\*
- Kraig Howe, Realty, Reclamation\*
- Pam Brown, Recreation, Reclamation\*
- Gary Young, GIS, Reclamation\*
- Gary Kraus, Realty, Reclamation\*
- Kevin Butterbaugh, EDAW\*
- Chuck Blair, CH2M HILL\*
- Brandy Wilson, CH2M HILL\*
- John Petrovsky, JPA\*

## **II. INTRODUCTION**

This document is a summary of the fourth Ad Hoc Work Group (AHWG) meeting for the Minidoka North Side Resource Management Plan (RMP), held February 20, 2003, in Burley, Idaho. The meeting agenda was sent to all AHWG members ahead of the meeting. The purpose of this summary is to document the topics and issues discussed at the AHWG meeting. John Petrovsky began the meeting by asking everyone to briefly re-introduce themselves. He also asked if anyone had comments or changes to the Meeting No. 3 Summary. None were noted.

The goals of the meeting were to finalize the Problem Statement, review the Draft Goals and Objectives, and review the Draft Alternatives, which were provided to the AHWG in advance of the meeting. The Reclamation Planning Team collected input from the AHWG members on each of these.

Since the last meeting, Reclamation has gathered more vegetation information to learn more about the habitat quality of many of the parcels, as well as where grazing could be allowed in the alternatives without affecting areas with higher natural resource values. This information is reflected in the alternatives and on preliminary grazing recommendation maps. The Planning Team also developed the draft Goals and Objectives and the draft alternatives.

## **III. FINAL PROBLEM STATEMENT: SUMMARY OF KEY CHANGES AND REVISIONS**

Since the last meeting, the Problem Statement was revised to reflect input from the AHWG. Two additional areas were revised since the last meeting: (1) items related to concentrated and target shooting on Reclamation land, and (2) unrestricted ORV use. In both cases, existing Reclamation policy prohibits these activities, and the question at the meeting last August was whether or not this policy could be waived on certain parcels.

Target shooting at the Cinder Pit and F-Drain has occurred for many years. Recently, a bullet fired at the Cinder Pit hit a nearby residence, passing through two walls and ending up inside the refrigerator. Reclamation immediately decided to actively enforce the no target shooting policy at both locations. Hunting is still permitted on Reclamation lands in accordance with IDFG hunting regulations. If a cost-share partner steps forward and can assume the associated liability, safety, and cleanup requirements, a formal target range could be developed on Reclamation lands.

A similar decision was reached for unrestricted ORV use. Reclamation decided not to set a precedent by lifting the agency-wide prohibition; following its own previously established policy. Reclamation, as part of either of the action alternatives, will conduct an access study to determine which existing roads and 2-tracks will be left open and which will be closed. After the study, the open and closed routes will be marked accordingly.

John asked if the AHWG noticed any errors or omissions that needed to be corrected to the Problem Statement. None were noted.

#### **IV. DRAFT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Draft Goals and Objectives document is a bridge from the Problem Statement to the alternatives. They are a result of public involvement—such as meetings, newsbriefs, and this AHWG, and findings from the resource inventory, Reclamation policy, and input from the Reclamation Planning Team. The Draft Goals and Objectives will be carried forward to the RMP, and specific management actions will be added under each objective. The management actions are what you see as options under the alternatives. So, when an alternative is eventually selected, those actions will be added to the Goals and Objectives document and included in the RMP.

Kevin called for comments and discussion on each goal and set of objectives. If other items come up, AHWG members can send their comments to Carolyn by Friday, February 28, 2003.

Objective NAT 1.2: Please define the word “dominant.” Chuck Blair answered that the objective of the vegetation analysis conducted in October was to roughly map the major plant communities on all of the larger parcels. The process began with Reclamation drawing polygons on aerial photos where changes in vegetation appeared to occur. Each of these polygons was visited by botanists who noted the percent sagebrush cover, which perennial grasses were present, and whether native or annual weedy species tended to dominate the site within each polygon. Polygon boundaries were also revised as appropriate. This was not a quantitative effort, but was rather intended to allow Reclamation to categorize the dominant vegetation within a wide range of categories.

This vegetation type or dominance information was used to determine how each of the parcels should be managed on an interim or long term basis. These decisions are reflected in the alternatives. The Reclamation team divided the parcels into three categories. Parcels with the most native habitat were designated for no grazing. Parcels with patches of better habitat or wetlands within larger areas of non-natives might be grazed but the better habitat would be protected (this varied by alternative). The third group was parcels where non-natives dominated and where grazing would not adversely affect natural resource values. Some objectives refer to “priority parcels” where more native species are dominant and where Reclamation should spend limited enhancement funds. The alternatives specify this approach.

Chris Ketchum said that if the native habitat quality of a parcel gets better in 10 years, what would happen? Management could change if habitat improves. Although Reclamation’s ability to restore vegetation in a climate with only 9 inches of precipitation is tough, opportunities may arise from fire or rehab funds. Taking advantage of those funds and equipment would help to do restoration. Reclamation’s main approach would be to look at conserving what we have and pay attention to changing conditions. For example, if something improves over time through current management, Reclamation would continue that approach. If other values arise, Reclamation would need to be willing to do what is appropriate. Reclamation wants to build objectives such that management decisions are not set in stone, but rather where management guidelines help us adapt as conditions on parcels change.

Objective NAT 2-2: On land that is leased for agriculture, would herbicide, fertilizer, and pesticide use be restricted? Reclamation leases currently specify that Reclamation lands need to be managed according to commonly accepted farm practices. The assumption is that lessees will

follow label directions for chemicals and fertilizers. The only time Reclamation would consider restricting use is if the lease is immediately adjacent to or impacting a drain or wetland.

Noxious weed control on Reclamation properties follows more restrictive guidelines. Roundup and 2-4, D are accepted, but would need a permit from the Regional Office for higher-level chemicals. Added restrictions may apply if parcels are adjacent to water.

It was noted that DEQ does not have any specific restrictions on agricultural chemical use. Chris responded that Reclamation is not likely to be more restrictive than DEQ unless something is about to go down a drain well.

Objective NAT 2-2 should specify that preventing an adverse effect to water quality should be defined as being “consistent with state and federal laws.”

Objective NAT 2-3 should be modified to say that in specific instances, higher-level chemicals can be used if needed on the remainder of Reclamation lands beyond agricultural leases. Also, the objective should recognize that some irrigation lands are turned into wetlands for the purpose of catching and filtering chemicals.

The Planning Team will re-write Objectives NAT 2-2 and 2-3, and possibly add another objective, to make the distinction between leased lands and other Reclamation lands more clear.

For Objective NAT 2-3, can Reclamation control stormwater from private lands? Chris responded that Reclamation is looking at urban runoff into Reclamation drains, such as the Wal-Mart parking lot, or future development of confined animal feeding operations (CAFOs). This objective lets Reclamation plan ahead if some new industries arrive.

Constructing more wetlands could be considered for dealing with stormwater use. Suggest that this concept be added, because—according to Steve Bouffard—some national foundations have funds available to develop more wetlands. Putting the concept in this plan can help attract such funding. Right now, Reclamation does not have the authority to create wetlands outside of their right-of-way, which is often too small for a wetland. However, the concept of exploring the possibility and pursuing partners for wetland development would be consistent with Objective NAT 1-4.

Goal REC 1: Add IDPR and USFWS to the list of coordinating agencies.

Objective REC 2.2: Add the term “wildlife watching” to the list of non-consumptive uses of the area. Wildlife watching is rapidly growing in popularity and can bring money to the area.

In the Recreation section, add an objective that says “subject to security concerns, pursue expansion of fishing in the area.” Also, add an objective that describes conducting the access management plan to determine where access will be allowed. It is important not to infer that access and fishing are altogether prohibited.

IDFG has and is working on some restrictions limiting ATV use by hunters, which includes all land ownerships in a hunting unit (such as BLM and Forest Service lands). ATV use for access by hunters is only allowed on existing roads that can accommodate full-size vehicles. Since

Reclamation's goal is to restrict cross-country use by ATVs, officially, that restriction already exists.

The Reclamation planning team will review all of these suggestions and incorporate as much as possible, plus additional comments received by next Friday.

## **V. DRAFT ALTERNATIVES**

The Reclamation Planning Team asked the AHWG to provide input on the alternatives in three ways:

- A table with all the alternatives is up on the wall. After a brief introduction about the alternatives, all AHWG members will have a marker and the option of making one checkmark next to the part of the alternative they prefer, as well as on what grazing alternative map they prefer. This will help Reclamation to see where the group is on this and help in refining the alternatives and selecting a preferred alternative.
- After everyone sits back down, each AHWG member will have the opportunity to speak about what alternatives or concepts they prefer and why.
- Additional written comments can be provided to Carolyn by Friday, February 28, 2003.

Kevin introduced the function and major features of the alternatives. The alternatives allow us all to look at different options for management. The Project Team went from three, to two, then back to three alternatives in our deliberations, including the No Action Alternative, which is required by NEPA. It is important to note that the No Action Alternative is not a do-nothing alternative, but rather that current management would continue as is, but without a comprehensive plan, and on a case-by-case basis. The themes for action alternatives—Alternatives B and C, neither of which is the Preferred Alternative yet—are similar because they both improve implementation of existing policies. Under Alternative B, the focus is more on protection and enhancement of natural and cultural resources in priority areas with good habitat. For Alternative C, Reclamation follows their duty to protect the resources, but puts the emphasis on multiple uses of appropriate Reclamation lands.

On the alternatives table, each alternative has two sub-columns: one for interim management of parcels that won't be retained, and one for parcels that will be retained for long-term management. The parcels map shows green parcels that are needed for project purposes and will be kept; red parcels that are not needed for project purposes and will be relinquished (98 percent of the relinquished lands will go back to BLM and be kept in Federal ownership; a few may be disposed in other ways); and orange parcels are split, so some portion would be split off and relinquished and some retained.

The alternatives differ in five main areas:

- Agricultural leases;
- Grazing leases;
- Vehicular and non-vehicular access;
- Day use sites; and
- Camping.

The Project purposes authorized for Minidoka include irrigation and power production (also includes sand and gravel for projects), recreation, and fish and wildlife. Reclamation's history was rooted in irrigation and power production. Later on, recreation and fish and wildlife purposes were added. Even though those are now considered to be Project purposes, Reclamation does not have the authority to build recreation sites or do habitat improvement projects without a non-Federal cost-share partner.

On many of these components of the alternatives, it is stated that the management action would occur on a "case by case" basis. For each of these, Reclamation would develop a checklist of considerations to determine whether the project should be accepted. For example, for a sand and gravel extraction project, some of the questions might include the following: Does the United States need these resources for project purposes? Are there environmental considerations? What about cultural sites? Does this fit with Reclamation's RMP? Another example is consideration of agriculture leases. Some questions would include the following: Would the lease use excess water and therefore help close a well? Would it interfere with project purpose needs, such as a future wetland site? Does the District have water rights? Are there high value habitats that would be impacted? What about cultural sites?

To clarify how grazing leases will be considered under the alternatives, Alternative B could be better worded to provide differentiation between the two alternatives. Alternative B should read: "Consider new grazing leases based on protection of natural and cultural resources and water quality." Two grazing maps on the wall show the differences between Alternatives B and C. Dark green is where grazing would be considered. Light green is where conditional grazing would be considered. Red is where grazing would not be considered at all. The maps are preliminary drafts and very well may change in next couple of weeks, also based on input tonight.

After each AHWG member marked up the alternatives, John summarized the results. The grazing maps were pretty evenly split. On the alternatives table, in general, there was a lot of support for no change in current management (Alternative A) and for Alternative B.

At this point, each AHWG member talked about their impressions and concerns related to the alternatives.

Cary Bristol: I am concerned about how to enforce these actions, such as trespass and ORV use. How will the sheriff's office be involved? Chris said that recent legislation gave Reclamation more enforcement authority that allows us to enter into agreements with local entities to provide enforcement. Those agreements will involve talking about workload and funding. Although right now the county can't enforce Reclamation's rules, these will become regulations fairly soon so that there will be enforcement capability and penalties. If violations occurred, offenders would go to Federal Court. Steve B. mentioned that USFWS will have a law enforcement officer available to assist at Bishop's Hole later this summer.

Mark Fleming: I am in favor of Alternative B because it focuses attention on natural resources. Some of the small lands with native habitat are very valuable, because some of these areas are still fairly intact and the dominant vegetation types are important for wildlife. Wetland areas are

also very important. Need to find a way to enforce and restrict the ORV use. We need to recognize that some practices are not excluded by picking Alternative B. Chris told me that there are three grazing leases on Reclamation land right now under Alternative A. If you look at B, there is the possibility for 16 leases. Alternative B could still benefit folks for grazing at the same time as protecting resources.

Steve Bouffard: I tend towards Alternative B for most things, and some of the recreation under Alternative C is good. I do see problems with enforcing ORV use.

Mike Todd: I like Alternative B. I advocate that everything possible be done to maintain the integrity of the habitat that is there, particularly native vegetation. In short, I would advocate a no net loss of habitat value approach.

Dan Temple: I am all over the board with these alternatives. The Irrigation District is a service organization. We are out to protect Project purposes. Things we are doing today and creating on the lands were not envisioned 10 years ago, so our goal is to protect all possible present and future needs. I don't have any particular issues.

Lloyd Richins: On the dry lands where there are no wetlands, the only thing out there before we brought in cows were weeds. We needed to keep the weeds down because fires start so easily, even just by one vehicle. Chris let us seed some of it, but it is tough to get anything to grow without rain. Last year, a fire went 3 miles in 30 minutes, hit grazed lands, and then slowed it down to where it burned a quarter-mile in an hour. We need the cows to control the weeds. This does not really improve the ground, but at least we don't have to worry about it being on fire. We need a long-range plan so we can go in and take care of the land. The government ties our hands. We want to spend money to improve lands next to our farms, but it is not our land to do this with. I want a 10-year plan where the government allows us to improve it so we can budget and plan for it. If they push us off it, nothing will happen because the government doesn't have the money to make it happen. Where we are grazing it, there is more wildlife on it now. There were six big bucks on it this morning; 5 years ago you wouldn't see anything on it because of the weeds. The government should put it in a long-term lease (10 years) to landowners who are willing to do something. I know you can't do that with everybody because not everyone would live up to their end of the deal.

John agreed that Reclamation would need some cooperative agreement for people who wanted to improve range conditions. Kraig said that it might be possible to work performance into the agreement or make something incentive-based.

Lloyd said that what he was proposing wouldn't cost the government any money to let landowners manage the adjacent parcels. Last time, Chris bought the seed and the landowners did everything else. At end of a lease Reclamation could judge the parcel and see how it went. This way the ground could be improved and fires would be prevented.

Billy Thompson: I had a shotgun approach to the alternatives and am not set on any particular alternative. However, I have a few questions. If they start reseeding with natural vegetation and down the road a few years we need it for some other irrigation-related purpose, can we go back in and get the ground after people spend money improving it. On camping and recreation, who will pay for these facilities? Do we get an operations and maintenance bill? If the Irrigation

District needs that ground later, can we go back and remove the facilities? Another concern is the roadless areas. Will we still be able to maintain our pumps and facilities? Some properties here need to be sold to adjacent property owners. Some landlocked properties—where you (the public) have to trespass on private property to get there and the weeds are a real problem—adjacent property owners would like to buy these. That would be the most beneficial use of those pieces of properties. This is only a limited number of extreme circumstances....maybe a total of 50 acres. If you turn it back to BLM, they would have same public access problems.

Carolyn said that recreation facilities would require a 50-50 cost share partner and the irrigation districts would not bear that expense.

Chris is going to look at the specific purposes for the parcels Billy mentioned. John said that Reclamation needs to address landlocked parcels that are management hassles. If we retain these headaches, that is not helping anyone.

Robert Christensen: I am all over the board on the alternatives depending on the issue. One of Rupert's interests is a tract of land near A&B property. The other considerations are the landlocked properties that should be used by farmers next to it, like Billy said. Drawing back on the site visits, some of the encroachments by farmers are sensible so that there is not a weed patch there. Need to have some latitude on a case-by-case basis to maintain the ground. The flip side is that some were sizeable pieces that have native grasses in the center that ought to be preserved.

John explained that the objective says to "eliminate" encroachments. This can be done either in an agreement or move the trespasser off the encroachment. Chris is still struggling with this issue. The first approach should be to survey and then worry about precedent that we set. If we do it wrong it is an invitation to others to encroach. The first defense is asking people to leave the property, and then work on getting it leased. Although it will be to Reclamation's benefit to work with people to prevent a weed patch, people have to realize that, for the most part, they started the weed problem in the first place by trespassing. We need to make it clear that future trespass will be dealt with on a harder line.

Dennis Crane: I am tending to lean towards Alternative C because the case-by-case basis is more personalized. I also appreciated Lloyd's and Billy's comments. If you can get these problems turned back to private sector, they can be managed better than it can be publicly. For now, I am going to reserve comments until I am better educated about it.

Jerry Ball: Dan and everybody else have already summed up my thoughts. The irrigation districts need to come first. I think you should still address the square-up issue. The way irrigation systems are changing today, we need a provision that if we can do some trading with Reclamation, we can put a better system in. As for the grazing issue, look at BLM grazed property. They do a really good job. It is really enlightening to see how grazing can be managed—Reclamation should learn from them.

John replied that Objective LUM 2-1 allows for the possibility for transfers of some parcels, but this is truly on a case-by-case basis. Reclamation's objective is to contact the landowners around those parcels and let them know the direction the plan is taking.



Steve Schuyler: We work with mostly private landowners, and I know that grazing is an issue, as well as fire control, weed control, and pest control. I work with cultural resources and know that sites sent to the SHPO have come up with no hits or recorded eligible cultural or historic sites, because there are not many around. I agree with Billy that selling off some of the parcels may be a good answer. We need a blanket policy on how to work through that, because when you make exceptions on a case-by-case basis it becomes a headache.

## **V. WRAP-UP AND NEXT MEETING**

The next steps for the Planning Team will be to make any final changes to the Problem Statement. Based on feedback from the AHWG tonight, the Planning Team will also modify the Draft Goals and Objectives and the Preliminary Draft Alternatives. These products will be presented at the public meeting on March 20, 2003, at the Burley Inn from 7:00 to 9:00. During the public meeting, we will collect input from the public in much the same way we have done with the AHWG tonight.

Next, the Planning Team will have internal meeting on April 24, assemble all the public input, and recast the alternatives in their final form for study in the Environmental Assessment (EA). This exercise will include identifying Reclamation's Preferred Alternative.

Our next meeting with the AHWG will be on May 29, 2003, at the Burley Inn. Before the meeting, we will send you the draft alternatives, including the Preferred Alternative. At the meeting, we will make final adjustments with you to the alternatives, and then they will be locked for analysis in the EA.

The Draft EA process will take 6 or 7 months. Once it is published, we will hold another public meeting; we welcome your participation and attendance there. After that, we will meet with the AHWG again before the Final EA decision is made.

The web site is available at <http://www.usbr.gov/pn>. If something comes up between meetings, AHWG members can contact Carolyn or Chris.

- END -